

Mending Young Hearts and Minds Since 1833

Since
1833

THE
CHILDREN'S
CENTER
OF HAMDEN

1400 Whitney Ave, Hamden, CT 06517

Phone: (203) 248-2116

Fax: (203) 248-9339

www.tccoh.org

Testimony of Jeff Drew, The Children's Center of Hamden in Opposition to Section 15 of S.B. No. 396 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE TEACHERS' RETIREMENT SYSTEM.

March 17, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Jeff Drew, Vice President of Education, The Children's Center of Hamden.

The Children's Center of Hamden strongly opposes Section 15 of Senate Bill 396.

The Children's Center of Hamden is the first agency chartered by the State of Connecticut for the care of dependent children. Founded in 1833 as "The New Haven Orphan Asylum", our agency has been devoted to serving the physical, emotional and educational needs of vulnerable and at risk children for over 185 years. Currently, we offer a full array of treatment services nationally accredited by the Joint Commission. We serve approximately five hundred youth and families each year. A central component of our service continuum is a State Approved Special Education program – Whitney Hall School. Whitney Hall provides specialized academic instruction to youth who require twenty-four-hour care at our facility and also to those referred by area public schools when the highly specialized needs of a student youth is beyond the capacity of the school system to adequately meet.

For over 50 years our certified educational staff have been enabled by Connecticut Statute to participate in the Connecticut Teacher's Retirement Program. Currently, we have 16 of our staff actively participating. Though this is a relatively small number – the ability for our educational certified staff to take advantage of this benefit has been absolutely crucial in our effort to attract and maintain qualified employees and experienced educators. The Children's Center successfully educates extremely challenging students because we have a competent team of staff. As a nonprofit school, you are likely already aware that our salary structure falls extremely short when compared to what teachers typically earn in a public school.

To eliminate our certified educators from access to the State Teacher's Retirement System is certain to irreparably handicap our ability to attract, and more importantly maintain, the quality and expertise we desperately need to meet the needs of our disabled students. The ability of our educators to participate in the Teacher Retirement System has allowed our teachers, in spite of a salary significantly less than what they would earn in the public schools,

to invest their career in our school and its mission to provide care and education to some of Connecticut's most vulnerable and traumatized children and adolescents.

This change would seriously jeopardize our school's capacity to fulfill its mission. With that, we respectfully request that you delete Section 15 from Senate Bill No. 396.